

# Ask the EXPERT 2018

## TIRED OF TAKING PAINKILLERS AND WANT TO AVOID BACK SURGERY? WHAT YOU MIGHT NOT HAVE TRIED...

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Of the 56 million Americans who have back pain, only 5 percent need surgery. Here's how to protect yourself and find relief that really works.

Maybe you visit the doctor and they send you for a shot or they advise rest, a cold or heat pack, or painkillers. When that doesn't help, then maybe an X-rays or MRI scans. It's a scattershot approach based on sometimes contradictory evidence of what actually helps.

Americans spend nearly **\$86 billion a year** to solve their aching backs. Yet for all those dollars — payed out to doctors and hospitals, for costly medications, manipulations, and pain-relief products to use at home — **there has been no improvement** in how patients feel afterwards.

Many people's lives currently revolve largely around pain from a "slipped disc", degenerative disc disease, or stenosis, to name a few. They try just about everything and **still end up miserable**. Often, left with the only choice of having surgery.

The truth is, typical insurance based medical treatment has oversold what it has to offer. **They're using tests, treatments and surgeries more widely than the science really supports.**

And what if you undergo surgery, spend months in rehabilitation, and still feel no better? That's what's happening to more and more people across the country.

### Surgery: Just Say "Not So Fast"

Here's the real problem: We tend to think of back surgery as the "Big Fix" — the treatment that will work, if other approaches aren't successful. That's a good call in a few cases — where there's a risk of paralysis, for example — but those types of emergencies are rare.

Otherwise, surgery offers specific therapy for specific conditions. **It should never be seen as "worth trying" for pain.** Such hope on the part of patients — too often reinforced by surgeons — leads to operations that offer no relief.

An enormous number of back surgeries don't

give patients long-term relief. By two years after their first surgery, about 8 percent of patients have had another operation; by 10 years after, the rate jumps to 20 percent.

### What to do instead?

Rather than choosing to have surgery too soon, we should be educating people on the mountains of evidence of what really works - proper exercise routines combined with stretching as a part of their everyday routine.

The goal is to stretch and strengthen back muscles, which can bring significant relief as you ease tightening and spasms along with gradually building the strength and endurance in your muscles that support the spine. **A physical therapist can show you how to exercise safely and for the most benefit.**

### What happens if I don't follow this advice?

Many people with chronic back pain become stiffer, less active and less able to tolerate the normal daily activity and loading for which we humans we're designed for.

Besides factoring in the road to poor health due to a loss of mobility and independence, imagine the quality of life you can potentially be missing out on. You don't want to be the one left watching from the sidelines, feeling like the "left out" grandparent missing valuable play time with your grandchildren, feeling old and like you're holding everyone else in your group up or simply not living the active lifestyle that you love...and deserve.

### What to do next?

If you or someone you know is living with or worried about suffering with chronic back pain, contemplating risky back surgery, or are not living the active lifestyle that you want, then talk to one of our leading back pain experts in Encinitas at **Level4 Physio-Wellness-Performance TODAY at (760) 503-4440**. Find out what other options are available to you.